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ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 101355Z MAR 09  
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4391  
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE  
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS BEIRUT 000274

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO AND NEA/ELA  
ALSO FOR IO/PDAS WARLICK  
P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY  
USUN FOR WOLFF/SCHEDLBAUER/GERMAIN  
NSC FOR SHAPIRO, MCDERMOTT

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)  
SUBJECT: LEBANON: ELECTIONS SNAPSHOT: KOURA

SUMMARY

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[11](#). (U) This is the twelfth in a series of snapshots we are producing on key electoral districts ("qada") in the run-up to the June 7, 2009 parliamentary elections.

[12](#). (SBU) Koura, with a population that is 65 percent Greek Orthodox and 85 percent Christian, is expected to be the site of tough competition for its three Greek Orthodox parliamentary seats. 2009 Doha redistricting drastically altered the demographics of this previously Sunni-dominated district that swept three March 14 candidates to power in 2005. Political tension and recent incidents of violence between opposing parties in Koura make the area a potential hotspot during elections. The Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (SSNP) is very active here, raising concerns about Syrian influence. The expatriate vote could also play a role. End summary.

KOURA:  
A BRIEF OVERVIEW

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[13](#). (U) Koura district is dominated by large olive plains and local olive cultivation produces some of Lebanon's best olive oils and soaps. The city of Koura has developed into a bustling commercial center boasting some of the country's best private schools. Lebanon's highest literacy rate is among the residents of Koura, many of whom travel to work in nearby Tripoli. There has been significant emigration from Koura to the U.S. and Europe.

[14](#). (U) Previously one of five qadas that were grouped together into the North Two electoral district, Koura is a separate electoral district for the first time in 2009. Redistricting in Doha had a big impact on Koura. Previously, the Sunni majority in the larger North Two electoral district determined who was elected as the Christian MPs for the district. Now voters in Koura, 65 percent of whom are Greek Orthodox and 85 percent of whom are Christian, will elect three Greek Orthodox MPs.

FACTORS AT PLAY  
IN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

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[15](#). (SBU) Predictions differ over election results in Koura, with analysts saying who March 14 chooses as its candidates will be important in determining the final result. Intra-March 14 disagreement between LF head Samir Geagea and Kataeb head Amine Gemayel probably will complicate the coalition's selection of candidates. Contacts say LF member and incumbent MP Farid Habib is unpopular in Koura and will likely lose if March 14 picks him as a

candidate again. March 14 Koura MP and Deputy Speaker Farid Mekkary does not favor Habib. Mekkary and Nicolas Ghosn, who currently holds the third seat, are popular in Koura and are expected to win, but opposition and Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (SSNP) member Salim Saadeh could take Habib's seat in the district.

¶6. (SBU) Although exact numbers of emigrants from Koura living abroad are unknown, the expatriate vote is likely to have an effect on election results here. We have heard that March 14 and opposition politicians are encouraging supporters to travel to Lebanon to participate in the 2009 elections, but it is difficult to predict who will benefit the most from emigrants' votes.

¶7. (SBU) Fueled by a politically tense atmosphere, clashes erupted in Koura in early March between supporters of Samir Geagea's Lebanese Forces (LF) and rival Suleiman Franjieh's Marada Forces. Fatal clashes also occurred in late 2008 between the Syrian Socialist National Party - very strong in Koura - and the Marada Forces on one side against March 14 on the other. Similar incidents could take place again. Additionally, links between Syria and the SSNP and Marada open the door for Syrian interference in the elections in Koura.

SISON